



National Environmental Health Service Corps

Effective environmental health and protection programs at the local and state levels are critical for preventing the occurrence and spread of disease.

- In public health, we know that disease is a product of host, agent, and environment.
- Twenty-five years ago, progress in sanitation, food safety, and other basic environmental health factors helped lower the rates of many infectious diseases.
- Since then, the focus on prevention has moved away from basic environmental health and toward environmental regulatory issues. This change has jeopardized our ability to respond to new or reemerging disease threats.
- The nation needs an effective interface between the federal agencies that develop environmental health and protection regulations and the state and local public health programs that are affected by the regulations.

Effective programs require a workforce with formal public health training that is highly qualified in environmental health and protection.

- Few national resources are committed to preparing future environmental health and protection professionals.
- Limited training opportunities are available for current workers seeking to improve their public health skills.
- Opportunities to upgrade environmental health knowledge are not readily available at the local level.

The environmental health professional is a key link between public health and environmental protection.

- We envision an Environmental Health Service Corps (EHSC) within the National Center for Environmental Health (NCEH) that would include a cadre of environmental health officers from diverse scientific, professional, and cultural backgrounds.
- The EHSC would identify the broad environmental health needs of the country, function as an interface between state and local programs and federal environmental health and protection agencies, address the workforce needs within the field of environmental health and protection, and anticipate and meet the needs of environmental health professionals.

The cause of many, if not most, recent outbreaks of disease are related to environmental health issues. For example, in Milwaukee, the public water supply was contaminated by small cysts of cryptosporidium, resulting in the illness of more than 200,000 people and the death of a number of immunocompromised people. Because of changes in meat production methods designed to increase output, production has outgrown safety systems, leading to contamination of ground meat by a new virulent strain of *E. coli*, which caused illness and death in several areas of the country. Similarly, drug-resistant strains of salmonella and campylobacter have appeared because of actions taken by the poultry industry to keep up with increased demand for its product.